United States Grills, Part 4

by Wm. L. Stevenson, Revised by L. G. Brookman *(From Mekeel's Weekly, July 27, 1942)*

Issue of 1870

The issue of 1870 is our most difficult period, simply because the work done averages so very poor in quality. Some sheets show some stamps well grilled, other stamps poorly grilled, and still others with no traces of embossing.

Some part of the mechanism failed to do its part of the work. I see no evidence that the steel units in relief on the cylinders ever wore out or in any way failed. All the results seen seem to indicate frequent and irregular failure of the bed to hold the paper up against the pressure of the cylinder. As the units are really of very slight relief at best, a very slight failure of the bed to properly perform its functions would produce pronounced results.

Two families of grills are clearly indicated. While there are definite differences within each family, I here list but the two fundamental differences as families and will describe the others.

H Grill

I Grill

H Grill: Cross grill, points down 13 x 15*

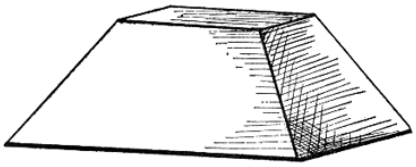
I Grill: Flat-topped grill units, points down, 11 x 12*

(The * indicates a row of incomplete units, at one or at both sides of the rectangle in the indicated direction.)

The impressions of the H grills are all those of cross-grill units. Two general differences are shown. Some come from pyramids with definitely dull points, but distinctly pyramidal. Others come from units of slight relief, very erect sides, and rather sharp, pointed tops which barely penetrate the paper.

While the two kinds of [H Grill] impressions can hardly come from one condition of the cylinder, I class them as all of the same family in this size, 13 x 15*. It seems probable that the second described units are due to a sharpening of the units of the other description.

The impressions of the I grills are also of two kinds. The commoner ones show definitely that the units used were flat-topped or truncated pyramids. These show rather broad bases, somewhat slanting sides, and relatively large plane tops parallel to the faces of the stamps. The bottoms of the pits in the faces of the stamps come from just such pyramidal units, with no traces of a pointed pyramid acting. The other kind of impressions come from units with very small and irregularly flat tops, small bases and very erect sides.



This cut shows the general appearance of the truncated pyramid units of the 1870 I grill. The sides of these pyramids are probably a bit more erect than here shown and the bases, relative to the tops, also smaller.

These are very rare. I have found but five or six in the 3¢ value to date, from as many different sources. All the I grills come in the one area, 11 x 12* units.

While there are comparatively few specimens from this period that show clearly every detail as described above, there are few, very few, with distinct traces of grill that cannot be readily placed in one of these four classes by anyone with a proper knowledge of the details here given, study of the cuts, and study of some decent specimens. The descriptions sound complicated. The facts are much less so.

That about ends the discussion and description of the issued grills, except for a number of things that could not readily be handled directly in the body of this article, in which I wished to cover only the fundamentals.

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Addendum: Scott Elevates "I" Grills

In the Scott 2013 Specialized Catalogue of United States Stamps and Covers, Scott recognizes the "I" grills from the 1870-71 Bank Note issues (Scott 134-144) as new major catalogue numbers. These new listings appear in their own section immediately following Scott 144, and are numbered with a capital "A" suffix. (Lower case letters identify varieties of the major, issued stamps, for example the airmail invert variety, Sc. C3a; major letters are used to insert a new major listing where there is no gap between major numbers, for example, between Sc. 144 and Sc. 145, where the I Grills are now placed with "A" suffixes.)

In a special feature article in the 2013 *Specialized*, Bank Note expert Ronald A. Burns explains the history behind the initial grouping of the "H" and "I" grills. In his article he cites his more than 20 years of methodical research to conclusively demonstrate that the "H" and "I" grills belong to two different families, "just as the 1867-68 grills belong to distinct grill families."

Equally relevant, recent discoveries and auction realizations of stamps designated as "I" Grills clearly show that stamps with "I" grills are noticeably scarcer and more valuable than their "H"-grill counterparts. In light of these findings, it is logical to elevate the "I" grills to major-number status.

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